Tourism Destination Image: An Understanding From The Literature

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ABSTRACT

Tourism destination image studies have formed a persistent base in tourism academia. A journey of the last five decades has contributed a lot in understanding and conceptualization of destination image which includes defining, measuring and using image for the development of tourism industry. Present study provides an understanding of evolution and development of destination image concept. Literature is reviewed to understand what image is, how it is defined, how it is formed, what are its various types and how it is measured and why it is important in the field of tourism? Present study provided a literature synthesis to answer these questions.

1. Introduction

Tourism is relatively new among different other traditional disciplines hence research in this area is also a modern phenomenon. Tourism academia has borrowed concepts from various disciplines like geography, psychology, management, etc. and disciplinary boundaries of this subject are yet to be explored. The concept of image is such a notion. Image studies have their roots in psychology. Though image related research is prominent in other domains like marketing and management, geography and psychology, it is relatively new in tourism literature. The journey of image in tourism began in the late seventies with Mayo’s (1973) work. Thereafter sufficient attention has been given in this field of research because of its significance in the tourism industry.

2. Methodology

Present study is based on secondary data only. Destination image related published literature has been used to understand the concept of image. The main purpose of the study is to understand how destination image has been discussed in previous conceptual studies. This study attempted to explore destination image, its categories, components, formation, measurement approach and its significance from published literature. Literature only dealing with these themes was selected.

3. Literature’s review

Destination Image:

TDI research began when Mayo (1973) defined image as “representation of what any given region has to offer to tourists.” Further, it was concluded that destination image influenced travel behaviour of tourists. Later Hunt (1975) found that image of destination is crucial for growth and development of tourism. He defined destination image as “impression that a person or persons hold about a place.” For Crompton (1979) images are “sum of belief, ideas, impressions and expectations that a person has of a destination.” Chon (1990), concluded image as “result of the interaction of a person’s beliefs, ideas, feelings, expectations and impressions about a destination.”
an integral part of the holistic image. Therefore, following four categories of TDI can be found in the literature.

- **Primary & Secondary** (Phelps, 1986; Gartner, 1993; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Beerli & Martin, 2004b).
- **Pre-visit & Post-visit** (Gallarza, Saura & Garcia, 2002; Seongseop, McKercher and Lee, 2009).
- **Cognitive, Affective & Conative** (Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004b).
- **Attribute-based & Holistic** (Reynolds and Guttmann, 1984; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; MacKay and Fesenmaier, 1997; Gallarza, Saura and Garcia, 2002).

**Components of TDI:**

Two components of destination image have been identified, functional and symbolic (Sirgy, 1982; Chon & Olsen, 1991). Functional is related to tangible destination features and symbolic means intangible attributes. Echtner & Ritchie (1991) have identified six aspects of TDI as shown in Figure 1. Along common-unique axes, common refers to common characteristics and unique refers to unique features of destination. Along the attribute-holistic dimension, attributes refer to perception for each individual destination attribute and holistic means consolidated overall impression in the minds of individuals. Along functional-psychological dimension, functional refers to cognitive evaluation and psychological refers to affective evaluations.

![Components of TDI](Image 36x293 to 298x464)

**Figure 1: Components of TDI**

**Source:** Echtner & Ritchie, (1991)

4. **Image formation:**

Formation of image is dependent upon information sources to which individuals are exposed. Gartner (1993) classified image formation agents into five categories:

- Overt induced (traditional advertising by travel companies in mass media).
- Covert induced (using celebrities in promotion).
- Autonomous (unpaid sources like news, documentaries or TV programs).
- Organic (information received from family, friends or relatives).
- Visit to the destination (personal first-hand experience).

These information sources have been categorized as primary and secondary (Beerli & Martin, 2004b). Primary information source is personal experience from previous visits and revisits and secondary includes organic, induced and autonomous sources of information. Beerli & Martin (2004b) found that information sources, both primary and secondary and personal traits such as motivation, socio-demographic characteristics played a significant role in destination image formation. Further, it was found that cognitive image affected affective image and both contributed to the formation of overall image. Echtner & Ritchie (1991) also concluded that primary images are more unique, holistic and psychological in nature rather than those who hold secondary images.

5. **Qualitative v/s Quantitative Approach in Measuring TDI:**

This has been a topic of continuous debate among researchers not only in tourism but across disciplines whether a quantitative or a qualitative approach should be used. Image studies are not untouched from this debate. If literature related to TDI studies is seen it is evident that majority of studies have used quantitative structured techniques like the use of a Likert scale to obtain data and factor analysis to analyse data (Gallarza, Saura & Garcia, 2002; Pike, 2002). Though Echtner & Ritchie (1993) emphasized the use of both structured and unstructured techniques. Structured methods use pre-decided attributes whereas unstructured methods provide more freedom to respondents (Prebensen, 2007). Content analysis (Jenkins, 1999), free elicitation (Reilly, 1990), photo-elicitation (MacKay & Couldwell, 2004) and open-ended questions (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991) are most prevailing qualitative techniques in TDI research. MacKay & Couldwell, (2004) suggested the use of mixed methods to capture destination images.

6. **Significance of TDI:**

A powerful destination image is needed to position a destination. In this competitive environment where various destinations are competing globally, something unique is required to position a destination. Tapachai & Waryszak (2000) concluded that beneficial images significantly affect destination selection decisions. Destination image is prerequisite to destination branding. According to O’leary & Deegan (2005), TDI significantly affects satisfaction level of visitors. Also, while making a selection of destination to travel, images play crucial roles (Chaudhary, 2000; Chand, 2010). Baloglu (2000) highlighted the importance of destination image in intention to visit a destination. Model tested in this research showed the influence of information sources and personal factors on destination image formation which ultimately influenced visiting intention. Further tourists’ loyalty is significantly affected by overall image of destination (Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014). Leisen (2001) pointed out that market segmentation can be done on the basis of destination images held by visitors, which are helpful in identifying target markets and using different marketing strategies for different market segments.

7. **Conclusion:**

TDI research has undergone a long journey in the last five decades and scholars have devoted to its conceptualization. But till today image studies lack a strong conceptual basis (Gallaraza, Saura & Garcia, 2002). This study presented an overview of present understanding of image concept and
enhanced our understanding related to various aspects of TDI. This research summarized the concept of TDI & various categories of TDI identified in literature. Further components of TDI and image formation discussed. It was found that different information sources have an impact on the formation of destination image. It was also found that quantitative approach dominated the TDI studies. Why TDI studies are relevant has been discussed and it can be concluded that image studies are crucial for destination branding and marketing.

References


